

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: KATHERINE AVERKA  
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER  
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**Y = YILDEREY  
K = KATHERINE**

**SG-LA-T508**

Y: ...about the Western Electric job.

K: Oh, the best job I ever had. I went to Western. I sat on my fat can. The music played. There was coffee breaks. The boss would come around and say good morning. Any problems?

Y: There was background music?

K: There was overhead, there was [unclear] music. You know, they had, they played this uh, some (--)

Y: What, what year was that? It must be later, 1970's?

K: Oh yeah. It was nearer to '80. Nearer to '80. Yeah. Oh no, wait a minute. I've been retired 20 years.

Y: So you retired from Western Electric?

K: Yeah. Well Western, they laid me off because I was the last one in. I got laid off and I collected checks. But it was a great job. The boss, we made very good bonuses. The group that we were in, we were fast. And uh, (--)

Y: I never understood. Some people tried to explain, how the bonus system worked in a group? What is the function of the group? How does it work?

K: Well if you're in a group, now supposing there was five people that worked. Well no, it had to be, a section would be, maybe twenty people in a group. And if we, we produced, it was fast. If you produced more than your daily quota, it went into the bonus. So sometimes every fifth week I would get an extra weeks pay. \$100.00. That's how the bonus worked.

Y: But if I were one of the persons in your group, how my performances affect, affect you?

K: Well, oh that's where there, there used to be arguments. You know, but we were fortunate. Like the boss said, he said, he had a wonderful group. We all got along, and we all minded our own business, and we worked, and we produced.

Y: Katherine, what I don't understand is, if you had your own stuff, you put your stuff.

K: Yeah, I did that.

Y: And next to you sits another girl in your group. If she works slow, or slower than you, how did she affect your bonus?

K: Well she affected it because it was overall the whole gangs. It came all together in one group. So that's why there used to be fights. If some group had someone that was a deadbeat, we'd call them, that didn't do their share. (Y: deadbeat?) Deadbeat, yeah, they didn't do their share. They, they're bonuses would go down. So they didn't like them, they'd want them out of that department. So they perhaps would get bumped, or they called them bumping, like if you had more seniority than I did. And they were eliminating this job. I could bump someone in the other department, because I had more seniority. And the ones that didn't have that much seniority was taken down graded. It was a good system.

Y: What was your grade, your paying grade? That was thirty-two, they talk about something (--)

K: I don't know. See, I wasn't in there long enough.

Y: Right. How long have you, how long did you work there?

K: Well until I got bumped. I got laid off. They laid off, when I got laid off there was about a couple of hundred that were laid off at that time. They laid off a couple of hundred. And uh, they, they said, oh I, oh yeah, wait a minute. I was sixty-four now. All right, I'm sixty-four, because I, I'm sixty-four now. And the boss brought us into a room. He bought us coffee. And he said he was sorry to see us go. Now where do you see that? He's sorry to see us go. He says the first chance he'll get, he'll hire us back again. Well I was sixty-four, and by the time it picked up again, I was sixty-five. So I was out. You know, I didn't get the call back. So that's how it, you know, worked. But (--)

Y: Some people complain about those bosses in, at Western Electric. They say whenever you looked right or left there was a boss around.

K: Well I didn't find any trouble in Western. They were very good. Wonderful. When I was a kid working in the Print Works, the boss just walking up and down watching how, what you were doing. But here they didn't. Because they could complain to their union. You know, they had, what is it they call it? Delegates. Yeah, they had the union delegate. If anything, if you

didn't like the boss, if he looked at you cross side, you could report him to the delegate. And the boss, they had to tow the mark.

Y: And if you look back, you did so many different things. You worked the Printing Shop, and burlers, and uh, what else? You work as uh, what did you call yourself after going to school and uh (--)

K: I was a dietitian.

Y: Dietitian.

K: Well I called it manager. Food Service Manager.

Y: Food Service Manager. (K: Right) And then Western Electric. That's the place where (--)

K: Western Electric, I was the boss. I breathed, I walked in, they gave me a job. You know, you didn't need any brains. You didn't need anything. All you need was just to want to work.

Y: But didn't you like using your brain while you were uh (--)

K: Oh, it was in interesting, but I was getting too old. I was getting too old. Yes, it was a challenge. In my food field I had to worry about my food cost, my help cost, all these costs that you know, you had to worry. We had to put on banquets. We had to put on afternoon teas for the faculty. Yeah, it was always run run run.

Y: Too much responsibilities.

K: A lot of responsibilities.

Y: And then when you went to Western Electric that wasn't uh (--)

K: No responsibility. Just, just get my money and come home. It's a wonder I didn't get fat.

Y: Yeah. And in terms of satisfaction, you know, what I was going to ask you, which job(--) I know the answer, but let me ask one more time.

K: None of those jobs.

Y: You did not like any of them?

K: I didn't like any of them.

Y: Not even Western Electric?

K: No.

Y: What would you (--)

K: If I had my life to live over again, I'd go to school.

Y: And do what?

K: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know what I'm capable of, it's too late now.

Y: Yeah, did you take an exam before starting at Western Electric?

K: Yeah. (Y: What kind of exam?) Dexterity.

Y: Dexterity?

K: Dexterity, to see how fast you could (--)

Y: Your fingers are? (K: Yeah) And what about physical exam?

K: Oh yeah. Oh, physical, oh yes. Everything, you know, they took(--). Oh, Western gave you a good exam. Yeah, you had a physical and dexterity. That was, first you had a dexterity test. If you past that then they'd sent you to the nurses, and you past that. You had to be in good health.

Y: Did you, did they give you a hard time because you were over forties? What (--)

K: No, see, this discrimination has been already past. They could hire you up to (--) When I, after they were closing the Print Works, that's when they weren't hiring people over forty. See, there was, then the law came in. They, the discrimination law came in. And they couldn't ask you age, or they hired people forty-five over, after that. So times have changed.

Y: Sometimes satisfaction after hard work, did you feel satisfied kind of, I mean that you did a good job, you worked hard. And uh, (--)

K: Oh yeah.

Y: Where? At Western Electric, or Service, Food Service Manager?

K: Well I, oh, I was a nut in the Food Service. When I, I was walking out from my job at Salem State, the chef said to me, if they get someone half as good as you, they'll get a good person. When I left they had to get two people to take my job, because when I'd be going home I would put the night deposit in the safe, in the bank, you know, I'd have my deposit made out in the bank. All right. And on Tuesdays and Thursdays the bank was opened. So I would get all the change from my cashiers. I wouldn't have to stop during the day. I was always there watching. And I was in there early in the morning to see the purveyors brought the right stuff. If they, if I ordered forty loaves of bread, I got forty loaves of bread. If I ordered these great things of milk, I got how many I ordered. If I wasn't there, how do I check? And when, when the meat came in, I would go over my list to see that I got it. So that's why my food cost was good, you know, there was no leaks. Nobody does that nowadays. The managers come in at 8:00, they go home

at 4:30 and let someone else worry. I opened it up, I closed it. Nobody does that. I was crazy? So tell them that i was crazy.

Y: [Laughs] But uh, I mean obviously you must have felt satisfied. I mean you did a good job and you worked hard.

K: Well see, that's what had happened. All my life I was a workaholic. All my life I worked. So it was just natural to keep on working there.

Y: Didn't you feel kind of empty after the retirement? I mean you did not have time to develop any hobbies, any uh (--)

K: No, I didn't have any hobbies. No.

Y: I mean how, how do you feel after retirement?

K: We, we went traveling there for awhile. I, I went to, I went to Europe. And then I went to Japan. (Y: Japan?) 1972, when they had Osaka World's Fair. I loved it. Kyoto, and Osaka, the Fair. We had a wonderful time. I went with a group. Then I went to the Canadian Rockies. That's beautiful. Ever take that? Take that trip. It's gorgeous.

Y: Which one? The Canadian what?

K: Canadian Rockies. You go along, beautiful country out there. All these Canadian buildings. Like Fort, like Lake Louise. We stopped at this beautiful hotel, and the lake is right there. It's a picture. It's beautiful. And the rooms that we had, no TV, no radio. You go out, you're, and the food was very good. And the bus was waiting for us. We had a bus that took us across. We went to Lake Louise, and all across, all across Van Couver. All across the Canadian Rockies. And this is all, government owns these lands. No hunting. You see the wild deer. It's beautiful!

Y: Yah, when you were as manager, so many people were working for you.

K: I had my problems with my help. I had problems with the help.

Y: How did you, I was going to ask you, you know, you worked as a worker, you started at the age of fourteen. And you know, to come from the bottom and up. How did you treat those people. I mean did you have (--)

K: Oh, well I was one of them. I, now if my sandwich girl, she had to make about three hundred different, three hundred sandwiches. And we had a sandwich bar. We had a hot, hot food our chef made, you know. Then we had a hamburg place, we had a soda fountain, and we had a pastry department. So if one, some girl was behind, or if there was a special thing going on. If a girl was you know, going, not going to make it, I would step in and help her. I knew all the, I knew all the jobs. I knew, I loved cashiering. I used to relieve my cashier, you know, I had two cashier and relieve them fifteen minutes, or a half (--) No, the other would leave, closed one of them down, the other one would come down. But I loved working with all these people. We had

a good repertoire. We got along very well. I had very nice people. in Salem State I had a lot of French girls. They were clean. They were workers. They were beautiful. They were great. And once a month we used to have a manager's meeting. The company would have, we'd have to go after work to a manager's meeting. Well I would bring some clothes that I would change after work. Well the girls always looked, you know. I had some nice clothes. I spent, I dressed well.

Y: I mean did you, did you treat them as a friend? I mean did you know their names?

K: Yeah, I, oh, I still get, you know, my cashier, after twenty-years I still get a card from her. Christmas I get a birthday card from her. She went out to Florida this year. She sent me a card again to keep in touch. And a couple of the girls have died, and I went to their funerals, you know. But they're(--). So everything is changed.

Y: About Charles, do you have any pictures of him later when he became a Colonel, you know, after (--) I thought maybe I should put next to his picture another (--)

K: I should have, I should have some.

Y: So that he's not just a little boy.

K: I have one when he um, was it 1930 when he graduated from college. I have you know, the small one, the college graduate, you'd never know it. You know, because he had nice hair, red hair. I have that. (Y: Well anyway) Then we have pictures, we have pictures of him in a group, you know like with all the officers.

Y: Umhm. If you find any good picture in the uniform, in the uniform.

K: I should have his snapshot, yeah.

Y: Snapshot, yeah.

K: Yeah, I should have some around. I should have some.

Y: Well thank you, that was very helpful. And that's the end of the tape.